

**HISTORICAL SKETCH**  
**OF**  
**THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH**  
**IN**  
**MANCHESTER, VT.**

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**BY REV. JOSEPH S. BROWN**

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## FOREWORD

THIS paper was prepared for a local church anniversary, with no thought of its reaching a larger body of hearers. By urgent request, it was read by its author before the Vermont Baptist Historical Society, at its anniversary in Chester, September 26, 1916. It seemed wise to give publicity to the history of one of the oldest, in continued existence, of the Baptist churches in Vermont.

The Manchester Baptist Church has preserved active life for one hundred and thirty-five years, outliving several sister churches "of like faith and order," at one time existing in neighboring communities. She is the mother of not only more than one daughter church, but also of two Baptist Associations. From the seed sown by her in early years have sprung flourishing Congregational and Methodist churches, through which her influence has been widened and perpetuated. Surely, no apology is needed for bringing her history before the annual meeting of the Vermont Baptist Historical Society, the purpose of whose existence is to preserve just such annals. The same considerations justify the publishing of these annals in pamphlet form.

## [HISTORICAL SKETCH OF THE FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH IN MANCHESTER, VT.

BY REV. JOS. S. BROWN

The Baptist Church in Manchester was organized June 22, 1781, upon the advice and with the aid of Elder Nathan Mason who, with other delegates, represented the Baptist Church in Lanesboro, Massachusetts. Many of the early settlers of Manchester and vicinity were of what was known as the "Baptist Colony," which had come into this part of the state, a few years previously, from Rhode Island and the southeastern part of Massachusetts. That a strong Baptist element existed in the community, at this early date, is evidenced by the fact that one hundred and ten members of the new church were from Manchester, and eighty-two from Dorset in which town, in after years, there existed a Baptist church, of which today not enough material exists for a post mortem.

For a number of years the records of the Manchester Church do not use the title *Baptist*. In the minutes of the Organizing Council the body is termed a "*Church of Jesus Christ in Manchester*." In the first records of the meetings of the Society, in 1784, we find the entry, "At a meeting of the *Anabaptist Society in Manchester*, legally warned, etc."

Two or three articles of the first Church Covenant may be of interest. Article 14: We believe that brother ought not to go to law with brother, but that secular controversies, as well as all doctrine delivered in public or private, ought to be settled and determined by the Church.

Article 16: We believe that it is the duty of Christians to avoid all *servile* labor on said Day (the Lord's Day) and to assemble together to worship God according to the direction of the Holy Scriptures, and also to maintain and practice *public* prayers in their families.

In the letters of dismission of their members, it is interesting to note, that those to whom the letters were granted, were "orderly and peaceable." Reading between the lines, this would seem to denote that the Fathers were not always of one mind.

At the close of the War of the Revolution, many of the residents of the town, who had settled in it as transient settlers, gathered there as a post of safety during the troublous scenes of the war, returned to their former homes, and the Anabaptist Church suffered the loss of so many members, that, in 1794, a council was held to consider the continuance of the Church. By a two to one vote it was decided a church could exist with "five male members and a number of sisters."

In 1802, September 16, delegates were appointed to "council with members in the east part of Dorset, to constitute a church." At this period we find references to the reception of members from the First Baptist Church, the Fourth Baptist Church, and the East Baptist Church, all of Shaftsbury.

In 1817 the church "voted to adopt printed articles and covenant, in lieu of those contained in this volume (church records), they being more explicit and plain to the understanding of members."

But the early records, covering the first thirty years of the church life, are very meager, being principally the records of committees appointed to visit delinquent members. As the present Clerk of this church once remarked to me, "They seemed to have had their hands full taking care of their wandering ones. It might be well to have a little of this in our day."

The only reference I can find in the records as to the founding of the Vermont Association is the following, "In 1785 the Vermont Baptist Association was formed in Elder Cornell's barn, to which this church became connected and remained for ten years." At the close of this period, from another source I learn, that, owing to the distance from the center of this association, which by this time had extended its borders so as to take in the churches at Orwell and Shoreham, to the fact that the church had fallen into a distracted condition, and also to local conditions of discouragement, the church, not being represented at the annual gatherings of the association, its name was taken from its minutes. The church never reunited with the Vermont Association, nor, so far as any records show, with any other association until in 1818. A note in the church book that year reads, "COVENANT DAY. Jan. 31, 1818. Voted to appoint Elder Chamberlain, Deacon George Galusha, and Brother Benjamin Sunderland, to meet in Convention with delegates from a number of churches in this vicinity, in order to form an association in this part of the land." At this convention, in Elder Cornell's barn, the same place where the Vermont Baptist Association was organized in 1785, a new association was formed under the name of the Manchester Association. In 1819 the new association met with the church in Dorset.

The churches uniting with this body were: Arlington, Manchester, Dorset, Londonderry, Hebron, Rupert, and Winhall. Pawlet and Wallingford afterward joined it. The largest number of members in this body at any time was six hundred and eighty. The principal ministers were Rev. C. M. Fuller, Rev. P. W. Reynolds, Rev. C. Chamberlain, and Rev. I. Beals. Those who planned this organization hoped to have united all the churches from the Green Mountains on the east, to the Hudson River on the west, and from Arlington and Salem on the south, to Wallingford and Whitehall on the north; but the formation of the Washington Association in 1827 prevented the accomplishment of this purpose. The association was dissolved in 1829, or 1830. Some of the churches have become extinct: Arlington, Dorset, Winhall, Hebron and Rupert. The others united with associations contiguous to them.

But, to return to first things. For a year previous to the organization of the church, Elder Joseph Cornell had conducted "by invitation, preaching," and it was in his barn that the newly constituted church found its first home. Elder Cornell was elected pastor, and the record says, "He having accepted the call, after prayer to God, Elder Mason proceeded and gave him a solemn charge to be faithful in the execution of his office, and then gave to him the right hand of fellowship. He also gave a solemn charge to the church, to do and perform their duty to him as their elder."

Elder Cornell was from Swansea, Massachusetts. He had been ordained at Lanesboro, and as has been stated, had been laboring, for a year previous to

the organizing of the church, in Manchester. A "Blessed Revival" was in progress, though there is no way of learning from the records how many were added to the church, during this pastorate—a condition of affairs that would not be in harmony with present-day methods of counting heads. This first pastor was a man of ardent evangelistic and missionary spirit, and Manchester was a center from which his influence went out in every direction. For fourteen years he continued in this pastorate. Then, owing to removals and other causes, the church suffered the loss of so many members that, in 1792, there were but forty-three members reported to the Vermont Association, meeting that year in Pittsford.

Elder Cornell, becoming disheartened, was dismissed according to the records, "for the reason that the church is reduced to a small number, and the elder wishes to have his liberty to go and preach elsewhere." He removed to Galway, New York.

About 1790-93 (the records are not very clear), a meeting-house was built on Cemetery Hill, still called by the older generation "Meeting-house Hill." Of this building I find no description, and no trace, save the remains of the north wall, which were unearthed a few years since, when some digging and improvements were in progress on the cemetery property.

The second pastor was Elder Calvin Chamberlain who came from Brandon and settled in April, 1801. Elder Chamberlain found many difficulties and discouragements. All church troubles are not of the twentieth century. By diligent and faithful effort, however, much good was accomplished, and in the first year more than forty members were added to the church, and, in the quaint language of the day, "the interests of Zion flourished once more." Mr. Chamberlain held the pastorate twenty-two years, during the last two years of his office having as an assistant Elder John R. Dodge. The veteran servant of Christ died November, 1824, and his remains are buried in the cemetery near the spot where stood the building in which, for so many years, he preached. Some of his descendants were living in the town, though not identified with the Baptist Church, when the writer of this sketch first settled in Manchester. I think it is of Elder Chamberlain the story is told, that he formed the habit of praying with his eyes open, in order that he might guard the choice apple trees standing on the ground then occupied by him as a residence, from the inroads of naughty boys, who sought to make gain by purloining the forbidden fruit during the hour of prayer, and who were much mystified at being discovered in their unruly pastime.

In 1823 we find a record of a service unusual for those days, viz., the ordination of "Brothers Trueman Hill and Peter W. Dean as deacons. The services form an interesting paragraph in the Church Book. A son of Deacon Dean was living at the time of my first settlement as pastor, and was the very efficient Church Janitor.

In 1833 the present place of worship was built, after many and long discussions, and some exhibitions of temper. It is described in the records as "of brick about forty by fifty feet, with a steeple, and conveniently finished within, having a porch, and a singing-gallery over it, and capable of seating about five-hundred people." Fifty-one years ago a fine bell was hung in the steeple. Only a few weeks have elapsed since, as I sat at my desk, I heard the bell toll. At the moment I was at a loss to know the reason; but in a moment it came to me

that the last subscriber to the "bell fund" had passed away. His subscription had been given with the understanding that, at his death, the bell should be tolled. The building described continues to be the center for church activities, though by reason of changes made in the interior, and the addition of vestry, offices, and class rooms, it is doubtful if it would be recognized by its original builders, should any return to visit the scenes of their former labors.

The first fifty years of the church's history form a more interesting record, perhaps, than the remaining period, giving again and again ample proof that the Fathers were not exempt from the frailties and follies of "poor human nature." As examples of the manner in which the church welfare was looked after, we find certain members admonished against "the harmful habit of playing base-ball, checkers, and other vain amusements"; while young men and women are taken to task for their "street behavior," and "walking of pleasure on Sunday." Three consecutive absences from church services meant a visit from the Church Committee; and if unrepented, measures of discipline. We find also repeated reprimands issued to members, for being "indiscreet and overtaken in liquor."

In these early days the minister's salary was subscribed, and then the paper handed over to the poor busy pastor to collect. One of the good men complained bitterly, and thought, perhaps naturally, that if he just had to do this extra work, the church ought to furnish him with a horse. As to this request being granted the records are silent.

Father Reynolds is the hero of the following experience, new to the younger generation of pastors, I dare say. The church furnished the minister with wood. The woodpile had gotten low. A committee had been appointed to "look after the minister's woodpile." Like some committees whose acquaintance I have formed, they seemed to have given the matter no attention. But in Elder Reynolds there was a determined spirit. Again and again the matter was brought to the attention of the church, and finally his "oft coming wearied them" and the parsonage had its supply of fuel.

This period of the church's history was one of alternate months, and years even, of prosperity and depression. Elder Reynolds, of woodpile fame, headed a following in the church who adopted the views of Alexander Campbell, and in 1829, or the year following, with fifteen members of this church, organized an interest in the east part of the Town, which continued to exist for a number of years. The last member received into membership by the writer, as he closed his first pastorate here, was a sister who in her early girlhood had been baptized into the fellowship of an Advent Church, long extinct, that followed, and grew out of this disruption.

During the anti-Masonic excitement, this church in common with all the churches in this vicinity suffered greatly. So strong was the anti-Masonic feeling that, so recently as fourteen years ago, it was said by a prominent member of the church, "The only thing I have against my pastor is that he is a Mason." Though I do not know that the most drastic type of anti-Masonic legislation to which this church subscribed has ever been recalled, last June it was the writer's good fortune to preach to an audience in which sat over seventy representatives of the order, a sermon called forth by the observance of a Masonic anniversary.

Through all these changes and difficulties the church has kept on its way, and at times has experienced seasons of great religious interest. Under the leadership of Elder Dexter P. Smith (1838-39) over fifty were added to the church and that mark you, in the "busy month of July." During the pastorate of Dr. I. H. Parker, three years, thirty-three were added to the church by baptism, and fifteen by letter. In 1858-1863, the church reached, under Rev. A. M. Swain, its highest mark in membership and apparent prosperity; in 1859 being able to report to the Association as follows: "We have received accessions every communion but one, for thirty-two months, during which time one hundred and forty-seven have united. The total membership in 1863 was two hundred and twenty-six. This was the period of which many of the older members used to speak under the name of the "Peacock Revival," from the name of the brother who assisted the pastor, in that summer campaign. As significant of the spirit of that day, one of the older members of the church, now no longer with us, told me that he well remembered, as a boy, his father harnessing the team and with the family going up to the morning services, while he, my informant, would return with the team, attend to the morning duties of the farm and then take his way back to the services. In these old times visiting was much in vogue, as a part of church life. It was not left to the pastor, by his lone self, to attend to this matter. Several people, for example, would start in the morning from the village for Barnumsville, and spend the greater part of the day with the friends there, partaking of dinner and perhaps supper; much of the conversation having to do with the things of the Kingdom. These were not always occasions of joy to the younger members of the families visited, especially if the minister formed one of the number. But, with a twinkle in his eye, the good deacon added, "Our house was large, and I could generally get out of the way."

The church even until recent days, has been noted for the number of strong-minded theologians in its ranks. Dr. Hulbert told me, the last time he sat in my study, that in his day the church had more theology than the Chicago Divinity School. When his sermons did not please his local theologians they would meet him at the foot of the stairs leading from the high pulpit, and assail him. One ancient maiden lady was especially gifted in this respect. The young pastor would deftly get the leading lights engaged in controversy, one with the other, and then he would slip away to dinner. My own experiences in this line were chiefly with a revered sister of the olden times, who would sit in her pew, and shake her head in dissent, or nod in approval, as she agreed or disagreed with the pulpit utterances. I fear she was not often called upon to nod in assent. A friend said to her one day, "Why do you come so regularly to church if you do not approve of Mr. Brown's preaching?" "Well," was the reply, "I like him as a man, and when he says what is not true I say, 'Well, he is doing the best he knows; he is young, and will learn better by and by. Some day he will come to the light.'" I always enjoyed a call at her home, although I knew I was in for a tremendous overhauling.

In 1787, the church at East Hubbardton (still existent, and having for its pastor the Nestor of our Baptist Brotherhood, in length of pastorate, Rev. I. E. Nye), was organized as a branch of the Manchester Church, and in 1826, mention is made of the Branch at Dorset Hollow, but the wording is such as to leave the impression that this branch had ceased to exist.

In 1825 the "first Sunday-school at Factory Point" (now Manchester) was organized, and has had life and force ever since.

As early as 1835 we find a Women's Missionary Society, and the first recorded contributions to missions, consisting of "nine yards of fulled cloth valued at nine dollars, and one pair of shoes valued at one dollar and a half."

Since the days of Elder Chamberlain there have been a succession of short pastorates, averaging a little over three years. I am pleased to quote from an old chronicle, "It may not be the province of an historian to divine the causes of these frequent changes, but it is sad to be compelled to record them, for usually they indicate some wrong policy on the part of the church."

Of the thirty-two men who, since the organization of the church, have served as pastor here there have been a number of more than ordinary ability. Among these may be named H. I. Parker, D.D., who was born in Cavendish, Vermont, was ordained at Manchester in January, 1842, served the church for two years, and then went West, dying January, 1885, after a long and honored career as Missionary, Pastor, and Educator in Minnesota, and California, "highly esteemed and beloved by his brethren."

T. H. Archibald, D.D., twice pastor, powerful in prayer. A member of this church, one of our eldest in point of years, delights in telling that the first Sunday of Dr. Archibald's pastorate was also the first Sunday that, as a young bride just come to Manchester from another part of the State, she worshipped for the first time in her now old church home. On that first Sunday, as the pastor ended the "long prayer," someone in the audience audibly exclaimed, "I wish he would pray forever." Dr. Archibald is held in precious memory in Vermont, as a wise and judicious leader in denominational enterprises.

E. B. Hulbert, D.D., LL.D., remembered as head of the department of Church History and Dean of the Divinity School, University of Chicago, Ill.—Scholar, preacher, teacher—was ordained and served as pastor in Manchester 1865-68. Died 1907.

D. F. Estes, D.D., Member of the Faculty and Librarian Divinity School, Colgate University, was ordained and served the church as pastor in Manchester, 1874-76.

Others of the group are well worth mentioning, but space forbids. Three men have been honored by serving a second term: Dr. Archibald (1853-57, 1876-79), J. A. Swart (1881-87, 1893-98), and the present pastor, Joseph S. Brown (1901-06, 1912—).

But if pastorates have been short, other church officers have served long and well. David Vauhn—first Clerk, Soldier of the Revolutionary War, first in company with Captain Smith to mount the Breastworks of the Hessians, at the Battle of Bennington—whose term of office as Clerk covered the years of 1808-1834; J. W. Harris whose descendants are still active in church work, Clerk 1840-1860; Deacon Chapman, 1847-1887; John Battis, Clerk 1860-1907, Deacon 1854-1907, teacher in Bible School for forty years; Edwin Burritt, Deacon 1859-1884; Mrs. H. J. Fuller, Church Treasurer since 1896; R. Burr Gleason, Superintendent of Bible School since 1900, with several years of previous service as Superintendent and assistant Superintendent to his credit; and many others who have served "lo, these many years."

Among the prominent members of the church may be mentioned Silas Baker, and Nathaniel Bacon, prominent in the early days of State business,



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Judge John S. Pettibone, Colonel Martin Slocum, Joseph Hicks, Peter Dean, Ranney Howard. Some of these are represented today in the working forces of the church to the third and fourth generations.

In connection with the church at present is a flourishing Young People's Society of Christian Endeavor, Women's Mission Circle, Service Club, and several organized Bible School Classes.

The church is represented by its pastor on the Board of Trustees of the Vermont Baptist State Convention and, with its splendid plant and membership, may fairly be considered one of the efficient forces for truth and civic righteousness in the Town, the County, and the State.

The following constitute the official boards of the church at the present writing, 1916:

Pastor, Rev. Joseph S. Brown; Clerk, A. J. Hicks; Treasurer, Mrs. H. J. Fuller; Treasurer of Benevolence, A. J. Hicks; Auditor, T. J. Hoyt; Superintendent of Bible School, R. Burr Gleason; Assistant Superintendent, E. S. Marsh; Chorister, Charles W. Sykes; Organist, Mrs. C. W. Sykes.

Board of Deacons: A. F. Smith, elected 1896; M. L. Manley, elected 1896; R. Burr Gleason, elected 1908; A. J. Hicks, elected 1915; E. S. Marsh, elected 1915.

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#### LIST OF PASTORS

Joseph Cornell, Calvin Chamberlain, John R. Dodge, E. P. Reynolds, Moses Field, Silas Kennedy, Dexter P. Smith, D. W. Burroughs, Harvey I. Parker, G. S. Stockwell, Winthrop Morse, Stephen Wright, T. H. Archibald, A. M. Swain, O. C. Kirkham, E. B. Hulbert, C. J. Butler, W. S. Blaisdell, D. F. Estes, T. H. Archibald, J. A. Swart, E. E. Brown, Herbert Probert, O. F. Waltze, J. A. Swart, J. N. Lattermer, D. R. Weston, J. S. Brown, H. S. McCready, E. M. Fuller, F. S. Clark, J. S. Brown.

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#### NOTE

Since this address was delivered the pulpit platform has been enlarged, the baptistry remodelled and improved, the Five-year Program has been approved and adopted, and five young people from the Bible School received to membership in the church.